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Plus

Dr. Kathleen A. Begley  
The Write Woman  
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com  
610-429-1562

## How to Redefine Your Career

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

**Note to Readers:** Here's another weekly e-update on current business communication issues from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

Over the weekend, against my better judgment, I tuned into a weekly CNN television show called "On the Money." As I feared, the program started with a group of pundits bemoaning the current state of the global economy. Then, in an apparent effort to keep already depressed viewers from jumping off Mount Rushmore, hosts Ali Velshi and Christine Romans announced an upcoming segment about a hot field for job hunters. Yes, believe it or not, they meant an industry hiring rather than firing.

Much to my astonishment, it turned out to be education. Why my astonishment? Because I'm a self-employed adult educator – and I've been noticing for the past few months that my 2009 corporate training bookings are far slimmer than they were this time last year. My first thought was that "On the Money" producers were off their rockers.

Then, as I continued to watch the program, I realized that I have been falling into a well-known business trap: defining myself too narrowly. OK, so corporate training most definitely is on a downslide as organizations struggle simply to stay afloat. Who wants to pay me to teach executives to give better PowerPoint presentations when the company is on the brink of collapse? So my question: who else needs education?

According to CNN, just about everybody in every age group in every area of the country. One of the more interesting ideas: positioning yourself to teach in an expected surge of job retraining programs aimed at the 10 million Americans currently in unemployment lines. Of course, most men and women have little interest or talent in education. I suspect, in fact, that many of you may regard dealing with sullen middle schoolers or angry ex-auto workers as a fate worse than bankruptcy. But I think most men and women today might benefit from working consciously to avoid boxing themselves too narrowly into their existing career paradigm.

What if your company or organization suddenly bites the dust? Stranger things have happened – witness the October closing of the once revered Lehman Brothers in New York. Here are some ideas to increase chances of your survival in this topsy-turvy world:

- **Read the writing on the wall.** In some situations, denial can be a good thing. When a loved one dies, for example, your initial disbelief enables you to make funeral arrangements before grief fully envelops you. But, in career matters, sticking your head in the sand rarely works. Pay attention to clues that your organization is in trouble, and start saving money and making plans right this minute.
- **View yourself as a product.** At one time, Arm & Hammer marketed baking soda only as a kitchen staple. How that strategy has changed. After identifying baking soda's unique odor-absorbing and gentle abrasive qualities, the company began selling it as a major ingredient in carpet cleaners and toothpaste. You can apply this same philosophy. Say, for example, you just lost your job as a retail buyer. What's to prevent you from transferring your negotiation skills to a field such as literary agent or divorce mediator?



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- **Combine your talents.** Over the years, I've noticed that many of the most successful people mesh two seemingly disparate skills. Did you know, for instance, that comedian Bob Newhart started out as an accountant? If you happen to be a professional engineer and amateur photographer, perhaps you could sell pictures of the world's structural marvels over the Internet.
- **Beef up your credentials.** If you have the money to get a degree in an entirely different field such as law or medicine, go for it. In most cases, however, you can make yourself more marketable just by expanding on your existing education. One of my friends, a licensed practical nurse, recently went back to school to become a higher-earning registered nurse.
- **Tap into human needs.** Last week, several news organizations contained stories about 10 specific companies whose stock was continuing to rise despite the ongoing money crisis. Two manufacture cigarettes. Although you undoubtedly would be reluctant to become involved in a cancer-causing product, you may want to think about the human need for escape and comfort in distressing times. Now may be the time to take a course in massage therapy.
- **Get a fallback position.** You've heard of Plan B? Well, considering shocking developments such as Citigroup's hot-off-the-presses announcement that it's laying off 50,000 workers, I think everyone should start developing revenue streams in addition to their jobs. Love dogs? Consider taking a pet grooming class so you can style Max's and Rover's hair for fun and profit in case your employer suddenly downsizes.
- **Keep your mind open.** With the daily onslaught of so much frightening information, it's all too easy to try to protect yourself by shutting down to new ideas. But sometimes, when least expected, a casual conversation or even a television show can generate insights to help dispel the stark raving terror currently threatening to overwhelm the world. For me, yesterday's "On the Money" was right on the mark.

*Dr. Kathleen Begley owns and operates Write Company Plus communications training. She has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at [KBegley@writecompanyplus.com](mailto:KBegley@writecompanyplus.com). She responds to everybody. If you feel you've become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in e-update, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. We'll be happy to delete you.*